

# Collaborative & Proactive Solutions

*Understanding and Helping Behaviourally Challenging Kids (and all the rest)*

© Ross W. Greene, Ph.D.



**Autism**ONTARIO  
*see the potential*      *voir le potentiel*

# Questions

- Why do the problems that affect kids lives so often cause conflict between us and them?
- Are the ways in which we're going about parenting, teaching, disciplining, and interacting with our kids teaching the skills that foster the display of the characteristics on the more positive side of human nature?



# Six Key Themes

1. Emphasis is on problems (and solving them) rather than on behaviors (and modifying them)...upstream (not downstream)
  - Behaviours are not the only observable data...unsolved problems are observable too

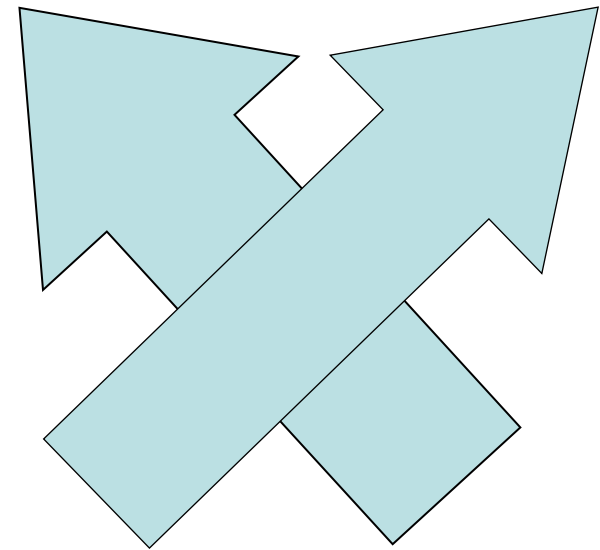


# The Clash of the Two Forces

## Answer to the Question

### When:

- Challenging episodes occur when the demands being placed upon a person outstrip his or her skills
  - best conceived as “unmet expectations” or “unsolved problems” results in “incompatibility episodes”



Lagging  
Skills

Demands of  
Environment



# Six Key Themes

2. The problem solving is collaborative rather than unilateral ...something you're doing *with* the kid rather than *to* him
3. The problem solving is proactive rather than emergent
  - this is possible if we answer two important questions:  
why and when is this kid challenging?
4. Understanding comes before helping



# Six Key Themes

## 5. Kids do well if they can

- If the kid could do well, he would do well

## 6. Doing well is preferable

- We've been focused on motivation when we should have been focused on skills



# Skills Behaviorally Challenging Kids Lack

- Executive skills
- Language processing/communication skills
- Emotional regulation skills
- Cognitive flexibility skills
- Social skills



# The Top Five

## Skills That Foster the Better Side of Human Nature

- Empathy
- Appreciating how one's behaviour is affecting others
- Resolving disagreements without conflict
- Taking another's perspective
- Honest





# Adult Roles

- Identify lagging skills and unsolved problems
- Solve problems collaboratively and proactively
  - Promotes a problem solving partnership
  - Engages kids in solving the problems that affect their lives
  - Produces more effective, durable solutions
  - Simultaneously (but indirectly) teaches skills



# Handling Unsolved Problems

- Plan A
  - Solve the problem unilaterally
- Plan B
  - Solve the problem collaboratively
- Plan C
  - Set the problem aside for now



# Timing is Everything

- Incompatibility episodes are:
  - Highly predictable
- 1. Crisis Management: Intervention is reactive and occurs emergently, in the heat of the moment (“What should I do when?”)
- 1. Crisis Prevention: Intervention is planned and occurs proactively, well before highly predictable incompatibility episodes occur again (“What should I do before?”)



# Plan C

Set the problem aside for now

- Not about giving in or capitulating...it's about prioritizing
  - Emergency C: “OK”
  - Proactive C:
    - don't bring it up
    - an agreed-upon interim plan for tabling the problem for now

*Good parenting and good teaching mean  
being responsive to the hand you've been dealt*



# Plan B

Solve the problem collaboratively

## 1. Empathy Step

- gather information so as to identify child's concerns

## 2. Define Adult Concerns Step

- identify adult concerns

## 3. Invitation Step

- collaborate on a solution that is realistic and mutually satisfactory



# The Empathy Step

## Goal

- Gather information from the child so as to achieve the clearest possible understanding of his concern or perspective on a given unsolved problem

## Introduction:

- The “Empathy Step” begins with the words “I’ve noticed that”, followed by an unsolved problem and an initial inquiry (“What’s up?”)



# The Empathy Step

What happens after “What’s up?”

- The child says something
- The child says nothing or “I don’t know”
- The child says, “I don’t have a problem with that”
- The child says, “I don’t want to talk about it”
- The child responds defensively, “I don’t have to talk to you!”



# The Empathy Step: The Kid Says Something

## Drilling Strategies:

- Reflective listening and clarifying statements. Asking about the who, what, where/when of the unsolved problem
- Asking about why the problem occurs under some conditions and not others
- Asking the kid what s/he's thinking in the midst of the unsolved problem
- Breaking the problem down into its component parts
- Discrepant Observation
- Tabling and asking for more concerns
- Summarizing and asking for more concerns





# The “Define Adult Concerns” Step

## Goal

- Enter the adult’s concern or perspective into consideration (“The thing is...” or “My concern is...”)

## What’s Hard

- Adults frequently don’t know what their concerns are (though they do often know what their solutions are)...adults concerns are not merely a repetition of the expectation
- Adult concerns typically fall into one of two categories:
  - How the problem is affecting the child (e.g., health, safety, learning)
  - How the problem is affecting others (e.g., health, safety, learning)
- The Define Adult Concerns step is a Solution-Free Zone, too...the first two steps are reserved exclusively for concerns



# The Invitation Step

## Goal

- Collaborate on a solution that is realistic and mutually satisfactory

## What's Hard

- The wording:
  - Should recap two concerns so as to summarize the problem to be solved (Starts with: “I wonder if there's a way...”)
  - The kid is given the first opportunity to generate solutions (“Do you have any ideas?”), but resolution of the problem is a team effort (collaborative)



# How are these skills taught?

## Mostly Indirectly

- Some skills can be trained explicitly
  - some social skills
  - language processing/communication skills
- There really isn't a technology for explicitly teaching most of the lagging skills on the ALSUP...but skills are being taught in each of the three steps of Plan B



# Final Questions (last time)

- Why do the problems that affect kids lives so often cause conflict between us and them?
- Are the ways in which we're going about parenting, teaching, disciplining, and interacting with our kids teaching the skills that foster the display of the characteristics on the more positive side of human nature?



# Additional Information/Resources

[www.livesinthebalance.org](http://www.livesinthebalance.org)

Walking tours/Web-based radio programs/  
Kids Advocacy Action Network/  
Research/Paperwork/Facebook groups

[www.cpsconnection.com](http://www.cpsconnection.com)

Advanced and certification trainings

